



Members of Congress are home for August

Summon them to Town Hall meetings on corporate power

By RALPH NADER

Don't miss another month-long Congressional recess without having your own town meetings to demand that your members put people over large corporations on policies and practices crucial to where you live, work and raise your families.

In 2009, with the Democrats in major control of the House and Senate, no more than 50,000 right wing Tea Party boosters filled town meeting rooms scheduled by lawmakers back home.

Their demands pulled the GOP to their side and they got a vocal caucus in the Congress to trumpet their objectives – lower taxes and deregulation.

Then in November 2010, their GOP took over the House. The Tea Party members had energy, far more than the laid back Progressive Caucus in the House. The Tea Party eventually toppled their own speaker John Boehner in 2015.

So furious were these right-wingers that members of Congress either reduced their town meetings or conducted them by video stream or teleconference.

You can make change happen during the August recess by announcing your own town meetings, bringing together a coalition of labor, consumer, environmental, housing, children and poverty groups. *Formally summon* your Senators and Representatives to attend and listen and respond to you.

There are always available to you town halls, school auditoriums, and other local places to hold events. Bolster your invitation with a petition with clear citizen signatures along with their occupation and contact information.

You the people have many more reforms and redirections for your lawmakers than did the Tea Party. The Tea Party was driven mostly by higher income small business and professionals. You vastly outnumber them and have more fair claims that you deserve and have earned but which have been denied you and your families.

These town meetings need to be focused on



Officials preside over the annual town meeting in Bethel, Vermont, March 6, 2012.

(AP Photo/Toby Talbot)

and clinics reported by the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine – (Five thousand patients a week die in hospitals due to “preventable problems.”)

● **Environment.** Hearings on the active resistance by big oil, gas and coal companies to faster adoption of renewable solar and wind energy and energy efficiencies in vehicles and other consumer products, in addition to air, water and soil toxic pollution so lightly regulated (as with pesticides) as to constitute a silent violence epidemic affecting everyone – but poor people the most.

● **The strip mining of the public social safety net.** Accomplished by the blank check of the surging unaudit-able military budget backed

by both political parties. These hearings would include restoring corporate taxes and taxes on the super-rich to the levels during the prosperous 1960s.

These revenues, coupled with the abolition of most corporate welfare giveaways, would enable the people's social safety net and key public services to be addressed. This includes infrastructure and updating social security benefits, full Medicare for All (single payer), comprehensive child protective programs, including the child tax credit and safe child and day care.

● **Democracy reforms.** Free elections of corporate cash register politics and obstructions to universal voting and candidates' ballot access.

● **Corporate crime.** The corporate crime wave needs to be turned back with ample enforcement and regulatory budgets, presently absurdly small. These corporate crimes and abuses infect the entire fabric of life and livelihood of America. *The Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Washington Post, AP, Reuters, 60 Minutes* and other media report these crimes but little or nothing is done.

Congress is your engine to go after crime in the suites. Time for long overdue blockbuster Congressional hearings.

one majority supported theme – too much big corporate power controlling your lives. Under that economic umbrella, the crucial economic, environmental and freedom issues can be the subject of Congressional community hearings that will draw mainstream media attention.

Let the phrase – fundamental corporate reform – ring through the politics of our country through November 2024.

How can these demands be conveyed?

● **Living wage, paid maternity, family and worker sick leave, pension reform, labor union rights, workplace health and safety.** Polls show big left/right support for these advances, most of which are long established in other western countries. The Congressional Labor Committees must hold dramatic hearings to bring workers to the witness stand to describe their deprived conditions.

● **Consumer rights.** Long delayed hearings on corporate crime, fraud and abuse, featuring people ripped off with gouging interest rates, shoddy and unsafe products, fine print contract abuses, pay or die drug prices, denials of health insurance, the corporate takeover of Medicare by Medicare Disadvantage, massive billing fraud and lethal medical negligence in hospitals

These demands are a good start toward strong legislation for a memorable August 2023. And they are demands that are backed by a large majority in the polls. Liberals and conservatives bleed the same color at the hands of big corporate greed and power.

This combination of voters is unbeatable politically. Remember – your members of Congress need your votes far more than they need corporate campaign monies. Corporations don't vote – at least not yet.

The Constitution begins with "We the People" not "We the Corporations." The word corporation is never mentioned in the Constitution. Never forget that the people are sovereign. Congress just receives your delegated power which they should use to benefit the people, not 1,500 or so corporations who run Capitol Hill because the people make excuses for themselves for not overpowering these corporate lobbies.

Less than one percent of the voters in Congressional districts has brought almost all the blessings of justice inherited from our forebears.

It will happen again, as long as this one percent reflects public opinion, they know what they are talking about and they stay focused on the decision makers on Capitol Hill. Some of the excuses for people doing nothing about their lawmakers include:

● **"They don't mean anything to me. They don't care about people like me."**

Really? Why should they, unless you make them mean something to you?

● **"They hardly come into our district until just before elections."**

That's exactly the point of these August town meetings you are setting up. A public petition by 500 citizens and some civic groups will bring in a reluctant representative. Not many more will usually bring in a Senator. Start now to give them some lead time. Some members will attend more readily without needing a formal petition.

● **"I want to do something, but I don't know what to do or how to start."**

Plenty of groups all over the country will gladly share their knowledge freely with you. The League of Women Voters, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, Common Cause and Public Citizen among them.

● **"We can't reach them to catch them."**

Go to their local office with your petition and summons to catch them for your town meeting.

● **"Big business lobbyists are too powerful for us in Washington."**

That's because you have not thrown in your "do or else" organized civic and voting power against their sleazy dollars. That's how it was done by our active forebears in U.S. history. They refused to defeat themselves from the get-go. Be inspired by these Americans.

● **"I'm just a nobody."**

Please don't ever call yourself that. But if you

insist, a "bunch of nobodies" formed the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the consumer movement, the environmental health movement, the peace movement, the arms control movement and all kinds of other advances for justice at the local level.

The formal summons to your legislator to appear at your town meeting in August before Labor Day is a great way to get their attention. It's a way to get media attention. (A draft citizen summons, which you can amend, can be found at *Sending Citizen Summons to Members of Congress* at nader.org)

Please realize – you the people are losing ground, being pushed cruelly into intolerable conditions, including corporations controlling your children via the internet.

Nobody is going to turn this around except for you putting these grassroots forces into motion to force public hearings, legislation, Presidential signature and implementation.

On this pathway toward a just society, you will find new friends, new strategies and tactics, new resources, and the awakening of younger generations to assume the passing of the torch.

It's called civic self-respect.

May you give your lawmakers a memorable August so they go back to Washington, working five days (not three days) a week and putting those laid back committees and subcommittees that you pay for to work for you.

CHC

Ralph Nader is the author of Unstoppable: The Emerging Left-Right Alliance to Dismantle the Corporate State (Nation Books, 201).

Problem Child



*"None of this is going to help you get into college, Timmy, let alone help you find a real job after college. I mean, listen to this: Art, jazz band, honors English, philosophy, plus four years of being a journalist on the school paper – are you shitting me? Everybody knows that the only sectors that have been hiring anybody for the last 70 years are the ones that **ENABLE** doomsday and your interests seem only focused on wanting to divert it."*



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Capitol Hill Citizen, 1209 National Press Building, Washington, D.C. 20045

Editor: Russell Mokhiber. Phone: (202) 656-7660.

Email: editor@capitolhillcitizen.com

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